

## Disabled people's access to High Street 'shocking', audit finds

Disabled people in the UK and their families are estimated to have a spending power of £200bn, but according to a government audit of more than 30,000 shops and restaurants access for disabled people on the High Street in Britain is "shocking", just two years after the London 2012 Paralympics which supposedly heralded changing attitudes to disability.

There are 12 million people in Britain with disabilities and thousands of venues, retails and others who have failed to adapt their premises, with a fifth of shops excluding wheelchair users completely, a survey found.

Accessibility information providers DisabledGo visited 30,000 public venues and shops in person to assess them, in the largest-ever audit of its kind in the UK. Dr Gregory Burke, DisabledGo: said "Businesses....are not communicating their access, so disabled people can't plan in advance".

They found a fifth of shops had no wheelchair access, only 15% of restaurants and shops had hearing loops and three quarters of restaurants did not cater for those with visual impairments. When they asked leading chains directly for more information, only 4% of 105 national retailers responded.

John, a wheelchair user from Derby speaking to the BBC complained that Men's departments always seem to be upstairs. "They say 'Just ask and we will bring whatever you want'. How do I know what stock they have until I have seen it?" "Going shopping is a nightmare for me."

Minister for Disabled People Mark Harper, who commissioned the audit and report said "Everyone deserves to be able to go Christmas shopping or enjoy a festive meal or drink with their friends or colleagues. Effectively these businesses are turning away potential customers." "This isn't just about doing what's right. Businesses are missing a trick by not doing more to tap into this market. A fifth of the British population has a disability and they and their households have a spending power of over £200bn. Improving accessibility is a no-brainer."

Shadow minister for disabled people Kate Green said the report made for "depressing" reading. "While businesses work hard to ensure their premises are accessible, some high street names are failing to make the reasonable adjustments they're required to do by law," she said.

## Findings of DisabledGo's disability audit

- Less than a third of department stores have accessible changing rooms.
- Two thirds of retail staff has had no training in how to help disabled customers.
- 40% of restaurants and a third of department stores do not have an accessible toilet.
- 20% of High Street shops have no ramps for wheelchairs.
- Only 15% of retailers have hearing loops for shoppers with hearing impairments.

Barry Stevenson, chairman of DisabledGo and a former Director of Marks and Spencer, said: "We are pleased that many retailers have invested significantly in improved accessibility in the last 10 years, but the majority are still not doing enough. It's entirely unacceptable for disabled people, their family, friends and carers, not to be able to access all high street shops and facilities. Disabled people are not asking the earth; just that management do what's reasonable and think more about how they can help disabled customers better. And that includes better communication about their accessibility online. It doesn't need to cost a fortune to do the right thing and it could be the deciding factor for disabled customers between you and a competitor."

The report comes following a number of reports in the press about a string of issues with high street chains, government departments and other service providers failing to accommodate disabled people.

The Equality Act of 2010 obliges organisations to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

## How we can help

Ark offer access audit solutions that have been specifically designed to assist service providers and others in deciding if, where and how they should be investing in disability access and meeting the requirements of The Equality Act 2010. Please contact us if you require any advice or further information.

To read the government publication in full click below.

[www.gov.uk/government/news/government-concerned-at-shocking-evidence-of-the-inaccessibility-of-the-british-high-street-to-disabled-people-despite-their-200-billion-spending](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-concerned-at-shocking-evidence-of-the-inaccessibility-of-the-british-high-street-to-disabled-people-despite-their-200-billion-spending)